Fil-Am Community Church

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Connecting with God

"THE PRAYER OF CONNECTION"

Welcome to Fil-Am Church! I'm glad you're here. I've been doing a lot of thinking about how to help you the best I can as we face the problems that this nation is facing. Then I realized that the Bible contains stories about the problems that the nation of Israel and other nations faced as well.

One of the stories that I found was in 2 Chronicles 15 where it talks about this in verse 5 *"During those dark times, it was not safe to travel. Problems troubled the people of every land."*

We don't just have economic problems in our nation right now. We've also got social problems, cultural problems, spiritual problems, relational problems. And all these problems plague other nations as well. Right now, many nations are fearing the spread of ISIS. Terrorism is one big problem in the world today. And this nation just felt it recently when this gunman shot four marines in Chattanooga, TN. And, of course, who doesn't feel the economic pinch we've been feeling since 2008? Greece itself is in near total economic collapse because it's not able to pay its debtors and people couldn't withdraw money from the banks because there is no money anymore. We have problems troubling the people on every land.

But even in the darkest of times, God always gives a voice of hope. In this particular time, in 2 Chronicles 15, he brought along a preacher named Azariah. Azariah had these words of hope to say to the king at that time, Asa, and the entire nation. He said this: *"Listen all you people. The Lord will stay with you as long as you stay with him. And if you seek him you will find him. But if you abandon*

him [talking about God] *he will abandon you.' For a long time Israel has been without the true God and without God's law. But in their distress they turned to the Lord and they sought him and he was found by them."* That phrase gives me hope. "In their distress they turned to the Lord."

That is my prayer for me. That in my distress I will turn to the Lord. For you, that in your distress you will turn to the Lord; for our church, that in our distress we will turn to the Lord; for our city, our state, our country. That during this time of tough times we will turn not simply to economic solutions or governmental solutions or any of the other things that might come along. But we will turn to the Lord.

Last week I mentioned that the starting point, any time you're in distress, any time you're in a problem, when you need renewal, revival, reawakening, restoration in your marriage, in your career, in your life, in your community, in our nation, it always starts first of all with reconnecting with God. I want to take that a little bit deeper this week.

How do you reconnect with God? Is it by connecting with the church, with other Christians, reading his word, becoming missions-minded? Nothing wrong with those but if you want to reconnect with God, you start with the very basic. Prayer. The most neglected Christian duty.

It is my prayer that we'll all get excited about prayer again. Prayer may not be as exciting as all the other activities we have as Christians, but it is the most important, most powerful, and closest to the heart of God of all activities. The success of all other activities rests on how much importance we put on prayer in our personal lives and in our own church life. As someone said, "Prayer is the engine that drives the church". Amen?

For this series, we're going to look at the best-known prayer on earth, the Lord's Prayer. It is found in Matthew and Luke. Why don't we recite it together?

We'll be reciting it from the book of Matthew in the King James Version, which I believe, still holds the distinction of presenting poetic passages like the Lord's Prayer beautifully.

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

For the next seven weeks we're going to tear that prayer apart piece by piece.

I'm calling this series "Connect! What the Lord's Prayer Means." Because that's the starting point on the road to renewal, restoration, revival, recovery, reawakening – whatever you want to call it. We're going to look at the seven different phrases in the Lord's Prayer because every single one of those seven phrases are an answer to the seven greatest stresses in your life. If you understand the Lord's Prayer and you don't just pray it; you live it – it will change your life.

Most of you know the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. Maybe since you were a child. You can pray it even without thinking about it. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth…" and you don't even think about it. But these are profound statements. When you understand the meaning behind the message you're going to find the peace in your life soaring and the stress in your life declining.

This morning we're going to look simply at the first phrase of the prayer. Matthew 6:9 *"'Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.'"*

I heard about a Sunday school teacher who asks her student, "Do you know what God's name is?" And the smart kid said, "Harold!" And the teacher said, "Why is it Harold?" Because I pray the "Our Father" and it says, "Our Father which art in heaven, Harold be thy name." And the smart kid quickly added, "And God's nickname is Harry!"

Speaking of Harold, I mean, Hallowed, it means "holy" or "sacred". But I'm not going to talk about that this morning. I'd like to concentrate on the phrase "Our Father."

When Jesus said we're to pray to God as this, Our Father, it broke all the rules. Jesus exploded all the stereotypes about God in two words: Our Father. You see, until Jesus came to earth – God came to earth in human form in Jesus to let us know what he's like – nobody really knew that God was our Father. You wouldn't know that God is your Father except for Jesus Christ.

In the thousands of years covered in the Old Testament, God is called Father only seven times in thousands of years. People just didn't think of God as Father. They thought of him as other kinds of things – creator, almighty one, and on and on. But they didn't think of God as Father. Then Jesus comes along and says this is how you're to pray: call him Father. Jesus uses the expression over a hundred fifty times referring to God.

What he's doing is he's exploding all the stereotypes. God is not an angry tyrant or a cosmic cop or an impersonal force. He says this: **God is a person, not a power.** God is a personal God. Because he is a person, I can get to know him. I can connect. I can have a relationship with God as Father.

There's only one problem. For many people the word "father" is a negative term. For many people the word "father" brings up all kinds of bad memories. hurts, difficulties, problems. Deep father wounds. For a lot of people their only idea of father is "You just wait until your father gets home!" And they think of

God in that same way. It's no wonder you have a difficult time getting to know him. The reason why many people never connect with God is because they unconsciously think God is like their earthly father. We transfer all those mixed up hurts and emotions onto God. We impose them on God and it's no wonder we have a hard time connecting with God.

What I'm going to try to do today is help you let go of some of the misconceptions and myths you have about God that really are inaccurate. And help you understand what God is really like. Because when you really know him, you're going to love him.

What is God really like? What kind of father is God?

The Bible says that there are three characteristics of the fatherhood of God.

1. **He is a caring Father.**

He is a caring, loving, compassionate father. God loves you more than you will ever know. He is loving toward you in everything that he does and his compassion is his most outstanding quality.

Notice this verse. Psalm 103:13 *"As a father has compassion* [not just love – compassion] *on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who honor him."* He cares about everything in your life – compassionately.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the time Jesus was with his disciples on a boat. They're out on the lake one day fishing and Jesus has gotten tired and curled up in one end of the boat and gone to sleep and a storm comes up. Evidently the ship's rocking and rolling and water's coming into the boat and they think they're going to drown. They go over and frantically wake up Jesus and ask him one of the most important questions in life.

Before I tell you what that question was let me just say this: if Jesus is in your boat it isn't going to sink. No matter how big the storm is, it ain't gonna sink. Amen? So the key is wherever you want help, get Jesus in your boat. You don't

want your marriage to sink? Get Jesus in your marriage. You don't want your career to sink? Get Jesus in your career. You don't want your relationships to sink? Get Jesus in your relationships. Wherever he is, it's not going down. You don't have to worry about it. You want Jesus to help you in your life? Get Jesus in your life. And your life isn't going to sink.

But the disciples not thinking, go over and wake Jesus Christ up and they say this, *"Lord, don't you care?"* One of the profound questions of life. "Don't you care that we're about to drown? Don't you care that we're about to go under? Don't you care that we're going down for the last time?"

You and I ask that question a thousand different ways of God all the time. "God, don't you care? Did you see the doctor's report? Don't you care? You see what a mess my marriage is in right now? Don't you care? Do you see I can't make both ends meet. Don't you care?"

The answer is yes, God cares. The Bible says this: 1 Peter 5 *"Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you".* He is a caring Father.

Now listen very closely. If you're ever going to learn how much God cares about you, you must learn to relax. As long as you're uptight and you're worried about your future and you're worried about your job and you're worried about making your house payment or surviving your health problem, as long as you are worried, you are not relaxing. And while you're not relaxing, you're not understanding the caring of God. He says let it go. *Drop it*. Cast all your cares. All your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

He's concerned about every single detail of your life. The Bible says he knows every hair on your head and their original color. He knows it all.

The Bible says this in Matthew 6 *"So don't worry, saying, 'What are we going to eat? What are we going to wear?' Your heavenly Father* [that's the caring father] *knows you need these things."*

How many of you are fathers? Can I see your hands? Don't be afraid. Fathers, do you want your kids to worry about whether they have enough to eat? Of course not. Do you want your kids worrying about any clothes to wear? Of course not. Caring dads take care of those needs. I want them to have enough to eat and enough to wear.

And God says, "If you being imperfect care about those things, don't you think that I, who am the essence of love – the only reason you're able to love is because you're like me, made in my image. I am the essence of all love. Don't you think I'm constantly thinking about your needs? I love you that much."

The point is this. Do not worry because your heavenly Father cares for you.

God is not only a caring Father…

2. **He is a consistent Father.**

That's really important. Especially when everything's changing around us. He will never let you down. He is dependable and reliable.

James 1:17 says this "*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."* God is an unchanging, consistent Father. He's not moody. He never has a bad hair day. He doesn't wake up on the wrong side of the bed. He doesn't wake up grumpy or grouchy. He doesn't say, "I really had a tough night. Who can I zap today?" God doesn't just walk around saying, "Man, that really ticks me off!" No. He is a consistent Father.

2 Timothy says, *"Even if we are faithless he remains faithful. For he cannot disown himself."* That is such a profound verse I want us to read it aloud together.

We know that the world is changing. In fact, it's changing fast. Everybody agree with that? Years ago Alvin Toffler wrote a book called Future Shock in which he said in times of rapid change people need what he calls islands of

stability. They need an anchor. A spiritual, emotional anchor to hang onto when everything else is flying off the wall.

When everything else is up in the air, you need something in your life that absolutely never changes to set your anchor in for the anchor of your soul. You need an island of stability in order to handle the stress.

There's only one problem. Friends, on this planet nothing lasts. No relationship lasts. No wealth lasts. No health lasts.

Everything on this planet is temporary. There's only one thing on this planet you can count on that is not ever going to change. That is the consistent caring love of your heavenly Father. So if you want to make it through the next several years of your life, you better put your anchor into that which never changes – God. The Bible says in Malachi 3:6 *"I, the Lord, do not change."* He's the only thing that doesn't change. Culture changes, opinion changes, science changes. But God doesn't change.

The Bible also says this, *"God will never go back on his promises."* You know the greatest cause of resentment and rebellion in children? Broken promises. But dad you promised! Mom, you promised! It causes rebellion and it causes resentment, broken promises. But God keeps his promises "I never go back on my promises." He says you can count on it.

I read the story of this pastor who grew up in a home where his father struggled with mental illness – schizophrenia – his entire life. Let me tell you his story in his own words:

"I have told you about growing up with a dad who suffered from schizophrenia. Not only was there inconsistency in discipline but I just didn't know whether he was going to be connected a lot of times with what was going on. So if you grew up where you felt a lot of inconsistency from a father, or a lot of struggles, I understand. I understand some of the struggles you've had to go

through or are going through right now in coming to faith in God and trusting in him.

"I'll never forget years ago – I told this story about my dad at a church in Chicago. And there was a girl who came up and told an experience she'd had, a tragic situation where her father had actually killed her mother and the struggle that she'd gone through in her life. We were talking to her about her faith.

She said something to me that's been an encouragement since then about finding God's love even in the midst of very difficult home situations. She said, 'I had an earthly father who took away from me something no one deserved to ever have taken.' He took her mom. But then she said, 'One day I discovered that I have a heavenly Father who has given to me more than anyone deserves to ever have given. That has replaced that loss. I've seen God's love in a brand new way.'"

There's a third thing about God. When Jesus said "Our Father," what kind of a father was he praying to?

3. **He is a close Father.**

He's close. He's not distant. He's not far away. He's right there with you every moment. Here's what the Bible says about that in Acts 17:27 *"God did this* [all the things he's done in history] *so that people would reach out for him and find him since he is not far from each one of us."* God is with you right now. He's not a million miles away. It might feel like he's a million miles away. I've felt that. But your feelings and reality don't always match. We all know that's true. And the truth is God is right here right now. He's a close Father.

For a lot of us we struggle with this. Some of us grew up with absentee dads. Maybe a great dad but he was just never there. He was always on business trip or doing something with his buddies and even when he was at home he was pretty disconnected from what was going on in the family. We yearn to be with close

with him, we yearn for his love and approval but we never could and this kind of yearning transfers to our relationship with God. We begin to try to earn God's love by the spiritual things that we do. You can't earn God's love. It is an incredible gift that God has given to you. You cannot earn it.

But we try to do that. We show up at church and we feel like, "I'm earning God's love. I'm at church. It's a nice, sunny day.

I should be out on the beach, frolicking in the sand and wading in the water to my heart's delight. But here I am. I'm at church, God. Am I earning your love right now?"

Let me just take a burden off of your life. The most freeing word in the world if you're trying to earn God's love is this: Stop. Just stop. God's love is a gift to us. It grows us. It matures us. But it begins as a gift.

You want some good news? Here's the encouraging news about God's love for you.

Number one. God is never too busy for me.

That's how close he is. That's the kind of love that he has. He's never too busy. The Bible says this in Psalm 145:18 *"The Lord is near to all who call on him."* Every time you call, he's right there. He's near. It's not like God says, "Her again?" or "Him again?" Or "There's a million people in line. Get in line! What are you doing here again?" No. God is near every moment when you call. He's that great that he can be near every one of us, every moment of everyday.

So, God is never too busy for me. God also loves to meet my needs.

He doesn't just do it because he has to. He *loves* to. Just like those of you who are parents. You love to meet the needs of your kids. It's one of the things you love to do. You love to see the smile on their faces.

If we're like that… here's what Jesus said about it. Mathew 7 *"If you know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father in heaven*

give good gifts to those who ask him?" One of the greatest things that you can do this next year is begin to enjoy the fact that God enjoys giving good gifts to you. It's something he loves to do. And being the Creator and Lord of the Universe, he has the capability to give you everything you need.

And there's something else about God's closeness to you.

He is sympathetic to my hurts.

God cares. Some of you went through something this last week and you need this verse. Psalm 34:18 *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit."* Maybe your heart was broken last week. Or maybe it was a long time ago that it was broken but you felt it this last week. This is a reminder of the fact that God is close to you. God understands. He is a close Father so turn to him.

The first word that every little baby learns in the Middle East is the word "Abba." Abba is the most intimate form of the word for "father." It means "Papa. Dada. Abba. Daddy." This is the word in Aramaic that Jesus used when he says we are to call God our Father. Daddy. Abba. Papa. A very intimate term. That's how personal God wants you to be with him.

How do your kids call you? Father, by your first name? Some parents call each other mommy, daddy, in front of their 1or 2 year old kids so they learn to call the parents mommy and daddy too. Well, Anabel and I didn't do that. We still called each other Sweetheart and Honey. I call Anabel Sweetheart and she calls me honey. Then one day after church in Jersey City, NJ, as I was chatting on the street with friends, 2-year-old Ally came out of the church running to me with her mom behind her and Ally was shouting, "Honey, honey". Everybody laughed. But, of course, she figured it out as she grew up that I am her daddy not her honey.

The point is, Daddy is the term God wants us to call him. I'm sure that's the sweetest thing that you love to hear from your children, "Hi Daddy! Hello, Dad!"

There's nothing greater than that. It's far better than the Right Reverend Rolly Estabillo. Or The Honorable So and So. Daddy. That'll warm your heart up anywhere.

God says you are to address me, Abba. Papa. Daddy. That kind of intimacy is what God wants from you. Not a religion but a relationship. God longs for you to have that because he is caring and he is consistent and he is close.

Let me close by being very straightforward with you. Some of you, one of your deepest needs is to have the approval of your father. There is a hole in your soul. You have that need to have the approval of your father even if you never knew him. The truth is you may never get it. It says more about your father than you. Your father may be unable to give it because of the pain in his own life. Your father may have walked out of your life years ago. Maybe your father has already died. There is that hole in your soul.

But there is a Father who loves you consistently, caringly, and closely. That Father, your heavenly Father can give you the acceptance and the approval and the advice and the appreciation that you so crave.